

of another inmate. Again his madness would take the form of belief in his own Monte Cristo-like wealth—the *folie des grandeurs*—when he would rush about calling to an imaginary broker to sell the French *rentes*, *en bloc*.

Now and then there was an hour of lucidity, of calmness, of comparative peace, when he was able to recognize friends, when, looking out of his window, he could see the glittering lights of the city, and imagine the Madame de Burnes, the Madame de Marelles, the Olivier Bertins, the George Duroys, going about their business and their pleasure as usual. Perhaps he

recalled the days of his lusty strength, when he had ever been so ready to *faire la noce*. But sparkling as had been the wit, loud as had been the laughter, there was always the undertone of bitter, weary sadness. Often his heart had leaped to fugitive joys, to the delights of the palate, to the glamour of woman's beauty, to the spectacle of snow-capped mountain peaks, to the surge and roar of the sea. But ever in that heart there was a deep cavern, locked tight against the world, and in that cavern there was gloom, infinite gloom, the gloom of a man alone, always alone, and gnashing in the darkness.

ENGLISH BOOKS IN THE NEAR EAST

BY EVELINE A. THOMSON

I can think of few more interesting things to do than to teach English at Constantinople College for girls. Picture to yourself four grey stone buildings standing on the heights of the Greek village of Arnautkeuy on the Bosphorus, and looking out over the sapphire strip of water toward Asia and the rising sun. Imagine these buildings fitted up with lecture halls, laboratories, reading-rooms, and dormitories; and seeming curiously western and American as they tower above the narrow, unpainted, wooden houses and quaint little mosques and churches perched on the steep slopes of the village. Into these buildings put groups of eager young students of almost every nation under heaven—Armenian, Greek, Jew, Turk, Bulgarian, Albanian, Arab, Persian, European, and American, living and learning, loving and hating, imbibing and im-

parting, and you have in some measure the physical aspect of this unusual American college for girls in Constantinople.

To teach your own language is always an alluring occupation. But teaching it to Near Eastern girls, gathered in the beautiful city which is the gateway from Asia in Europe, has a charm all its own. To begin with, you learn a very great deal about your rich, confusing, and altogether illogical mother tongue, and at the same time you catch fleeting glimpses of oriental and slavie minds and modes of thought that repay you a hundredfold for any drudgery that may be connected with the work. After a few years of experience, when you have caught the eastern methods of expression, when you have noted the likes and dislikes manifested toward your own literature, you try to picture

to yourself the background of books and letters which these girls have brought from their old-world ancestry and eastern homes to your modern American classroom. You grope for a long time in the dark and feel it would take a lifetime to discover all there is to know of the minds behind these eager foreign faces in front of you. You find that generalizing is almost impossible; that each nationality shows startling differences; that you, with your western training and direct manner of thought, must indeed have infinite patience and infinite sympathy to understand the devious workings of the oriental mind.

It was my good fortune not only to teach at Constantinople College but also to study there, so that in my student days I learned my own language side by side with Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians, and Turks. Let me say that often, to my chagrin, their turn of phrase and mode of description were far more vivid than my own, although my grammar was more correct. From their enthusiasms and from our long conversations on the meaning of the universe, so dear to the hearts of all students the world over, did I learn what they had been reading before the door to English literature was opened to them, and what they understood and appreciated in that literature, once they were able to reach out and taste its sweets.

A few things can be said of Near Eastern literature in general. One fact never to be forgotten is that the ancient classic period is held in constant remembrance. These people live in past history, which has been kept alive and glowing by their ancient writers and poets. The Armenians remember the time when the great Armenian nation defeated the Persians hundreds of years ago. The

Greeks speak with familiarity of "our great writers", Euripides, Socrates, Plato; the Bulgarians turn to ancient Slavic, in which language is recorded the history of the one-time Great Empire of the Bulgars; and the Turks, if they have any pretensions toward education, are familiar with the Persian and Arabic poets, whose literature they consider a part of their own.

Another feature of present-day Near Eastern literature is its intensely nationalistic temper. For almost a hundred years, ever since the Balkan States began to be released from the paralyzing tyranny of Turkish oppression, when all national writing was ruthlessly suppressed, these liberated people have burst forth with extraordinary vigor into songs and stories of their freedom, their dreams of greatness, and their national aspirations. Every modern Balkan poet is a zealous patriot. A tragic strain as well as a fiery nationalism run through all their writings and the students at the college reflect and appreciate both.

It must not be forgotten that while Greece, Bulgaria, Roumania, Serbia, and Montenegro have all enjoyed political liberty for some years, the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire, that is, Ottoman Greeks, Armenians, and Turks, have only since 1908 had freedom of speech and press. Before that time all writing bearing upon national or religious subjects was impossible, so it can easily be imagined what an outburst of fervent words—poetry and prose—there has been in Turkey in the last ten years. I am reminded of a certain inspired Turkish poet, who lived in an interesting house perched on the very edge of a cliff overlooking the Bosphorus. He was an idealist and an ardent member of the Young Turk party when it was a revolution-

ary society representing the best minds of the Empire. Of course he could not allow his real sympathies to be known, as in those days a Young Turk was in constant danger of his life. He did not dare to write or have published any of the many patriotic poems which he composed; so he and his wife, a lady of great charm and intelligence, learned them by heart, and when at last despotism in Turkey was crushed, the poems appeared in print.

I remember, too, a Greek fellow student's telling me how her father, shortly after the massacres of 1896, decided to burn all the books he possessed. "There was nothing revolutionary in them", she said, "but anything *written* is to a Turk dangerous, and who knows what they might have done to my father if they had searched our house and found many Greek books in it? So we had a bonfire, a great bonfire in the back garden, and all our beautiful old Greek books went up in flames!"

Another girl, an Armenian, told me how for years her mother had kept sewn up in her mattress copies of certain patriotic Armenian songs, which had been handed down from father to son and mother to daughter for many generations. It is small wonder that present Near Eastern folk cannot get their fill of patriotic verse and story. They have hungered and thirsted for it for years, and they are children in their naïve relish of sonorous battle songs and ancient epics.

The college library, which boasts some 6,000 volumes, has a fair sprinkling of books in the vernacular, for the students are urged to study their own language as well as English. All libraries are windows looking out upon new worlds, but this small collection of books, western and eastern, ancient and modern, in an American

institution in Turkey certainly holds a unique position in that respect. How many are the windows and how strange and interesting the outlooks which the eastern students can enjoy through the books there assembled. It is a popular place and its volumes are well worn. Here East meets West and strives to understand.

Many students, who have already had training in European schools, of which there are a goodly number in the Empire, often possess an astonishing familiarity with certain French classics. They are inclined to amaze the English professor by quoting Balzac, Dumas, George Sand, and Molière and to have at the age of seventeen or eighteen a complete acquaintance with the writings of Maupassant. Near Eastern girls develop much earlier than western girls and, while they are supposed to be sheltered and protected in every way that is physically possible, their knowledge of the world through books is often startling. Bulgarian girls are as a rule familiar with most of the modern Russian writers. While Russian and Bulgarian are different languages, an educated person knowing one can read the other easily. Also there are many Bulgarian translations of Russian books. Nearly all students before they come to the college can read one other language besides their own.

As to their appreciation of English literature, it is very real. They are good linguists and soon master the language. Poetry they are very fond of, having, as they do, an instinctive musical sense. They find, however, that English poetry is sometimes exceedingly difficult to understand, especially modern poetry. It must be read and interpreted to them slowly and with sympathy, but once they have caught the spirit of it, they are quick

to respond. They like to memorize poetry, though the effect of hearing an Armenian tongue declaim "Hamlet" or a Greek recite "In Memoriam" is often rather painful for the sensitive English ears of the professor. Stories and novels, especially about American life, interest and absorb them. They are quick to see dramatic values; and plays of any kind, the more tragic the better, make a direct appeal. It is more difficult for them to appreciate humor in literature, though even here their understanding is astonishing. I remember a classmate of mine, a most intelligent Greek girl, who was an ardent admirer of Dickens. She never could have enough of him and read and reread him. She was also in the habit of quoting Mr. Micawber and Sam Weller, with as keen delight and often with far greater accuracy than many English people. She once won a competitive prize for an essay on "Shakespeare's Jesters", which was incredibly good in its analysis of Shakespeare's humor.

I remember a Bulgarian student whose hero was Emerson. It is a long way from Concord to Sofia, but human aspirations are the same and the great American thinker touches the human chord in the east as well as in the west.

Now that the war is over and the way to Constantinople is open, I hope to return to my English classroom there. What is going to be the policy of the future? How much will the west contribute to the rehabilitation and regeneration of the Near East? Will the hostile nations of those troublesome corners of Asia and Europe ever work out a peaceful basis of cooperation? Will the East ever understand the West? It is impossible to prophesy; but I cherish the belief that the humble professor of English, with the help of the little nucleus of books in the Constantinople College library on the Bosphorus, can feel she has an infinitesimal share in answering these questions in the new era that is dawning.

THE LONDONER

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I forget whether in a former letter I explained one curious thing about the London book market and the prevalence of the long novel in England. The facts are singular, and deserve recognition, so I will risk repetition and make the explanation now. The long novel is in England more profitable than the short one. That is, if the book has any quality at all. If it is a question of realizing profit upon a small sale, every publisher will give preference to the *conte*, such as Oliver Onions's "In Accordance with the Evidence" or Rebecca West's "The Return of the Soldier". But in general the books which have had the greatest vogue here are the long books.

The reason is easily made clear. We sell most of our novels to the circulating libraries, as I have certainly demonstrated in an earlier letter. The libraries take as few copies of every book as they can. No blame attaches to them for such economy. If the book "reads well"—a library phrase—more copies can be bought, and in any case it is evident that the quicker the books are read the sooner are the copies in circulation returned and once again sent out to eager readers. A short book is read in an evening. It comes back the next day. Fewer copies of a short book are needed to supply a demand than are required of a long book which takes several days to get through. The long book stays out longer. The ebb and flow of its circulation is slower. Therefore, more copies have to be obtained

if the libraries are to keep pace with the demand among their subscribers. It may be assumed, therefore, that a long book sells in a proportion of five to one against a short novel which attains the same circulation through the libraries. This is putting the case at its simplest. You cannot obtain for a short novel anything like the sale possible to a long one. The same copy is read over and over again.

There is another point in favor of the long book, and that is that many people read part of a book, like it, and are prevented from continuing their reading for several days. They pat the book, and say wisely, "I must go on with you another time". Opportunity for the resumed reading does not come for some days. The book remains unopened. Sometimes it is never taken up again, but remains out on the table for three or four weeks, and is at last sent back to the library because in the interval the reader's enthusiasm has cooled and his curiosity has been aroused about another book altogether. This is a remarkable fact, and it is well worth considering, because I believe that the same element does not affect success in any other country. It is a peculiarity of English literary conditions.

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Let me give you an example of the point. In 1917 Norman Douglas published a most astonishing novel called "South Wind". It was in some ways a great work, but it was not written in a popular style, and anybody com-